Drew (Rowell) Aunt
Cornelia

Aunt Cornelia

Thomas J. Rowell

REF
B
Drew

My original intention was to write about Aunt Cornelia as I knew her and the interesting things that occurred in her life, both happy and sad. But as I relived her past with us, it always linked up with some special occasions with us or others of our kinfolks. If you find the few things I remember about Aunt Cornelia interesting, along with Sarah's remembrance of her (although quite young), I will be pleased and I am sure Sarah feels the same. Excuse us for "climbing the Family Tree", but who else could have been around at those special times.

I wish to thank the following for their assistance:

My sister, Sarah Rowell Johnson of Richmond, and my brothers, Charles Gray and Joseph Wheeler of Surry.

My niece, Lois Jean Rowell, and my cousin, Mary Clinch Thompson.

Sarah Powell Trapnell of Richmond, niece of W. P. Wilson, (deceased) owner of Mantura.

James Dashiell of Rushmere, husband of Alice Rowell Dashiell (deceased).

Abraham Bailey of Surry who constructed the tombstone for Aunt Cornelia's grave.

Willie Winfield of Surry, who as a boy worked for us during the time of Aunt Cornelia and is probably the only person living who remembers her husband, David.

Thomas Jefferson Rowell
December, 1981

1/6/83

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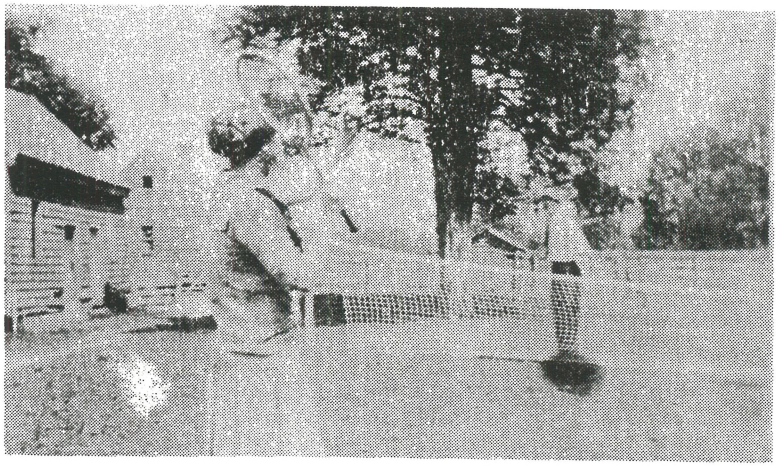
Cornelia Johnson Drew

MANTURA

Alice Rowell
(Dashiell)



Martha Rowell (Jones) and Charles Gray Rowell

Cornelia Johnson Drew

The known story of Cornelia Johnson Drew begins at Mantura[1] in the year 1845. It was to this house that William R. Wilson and his bride, Martha E. Pegram, drove after their wedding in December of that year. Riding in the foot of their carriage was a wedding present, a young slave girl, Cornelia Johnson.

Little is known of Aunt Cornelia (as we came to know her many years later) during this period of her life. Her experiences surely were highly interesting in the ensuing years, but I fail to recall any incidents of her life (that she may have told me) except for the period when the War Between the States was thrust upon her. How well I remember her story of being sent to Chesterfield County to escape being carried away by the Yankees. There she lived with and worked for a Mr. Lippencott, cleaning horse stables most of the time. She returned to Surry County after the War was over.

At some point in the years between 1845 and 1900, Aunt Cornelia married David Drew and they had three daughters, Ida (Perry), Mary (Porter) and Pattie (married George Bromley). It is believed that David died in 1905.[2]

I shall always regret that I never learned more of Aunt Cornelia's early life. What follows in my story are my recollections of her and her influence on our lives.

My first memory of Aunt Cornelia was in August, 1907. Our family - Momma, Daddy, Charlie Gray, Joe, James, Ballie, myself, Aunt Cornelia, Uncle John, Auntie Gray and Aunt Lucy

Gwaltney[3] (also a former slave) - spent a week on Uncle John's sailboat[4] visiting the Jamestown Exposition (held at what is now the Norfolk Naval Base). We carried food, coops of chickens (no refrigeration those days) and lived on the boat, visiting the fair each day.[5]

While on this junket, we caught and ate lots of crabs, and Aunt Cornelia and Aunt Lucy were both sick from eating them. As well as I can remember, she would never eat another female crab (as everyone said the female crab would make you sick) and I too have been scared of the weaker member of the crab family since.

I do not know how and when she started living with and nursing us[6] but during the years after 1907, she lived with us weekdays[7] and stayed with her daughter Pattie (at Chippokes) on weekends. One of us boys would take her to and from in the buggy. Aunt Cornelia's other daughters, Ida and Mary, lived in Norfolk; and most every summer (as long as she was able), Aunt Cornelia would visit them. She traveled to Norfolk, carrying her clothes in a basket,[8] riding the steamer Pocahontas from Cobham Wharf. Charlie Gray recalls writing letters to the Norfolk daughters from time to time for Aunt Cornelia.

Aunt Cornelia was everybody and everything to us - cook, nurse, gardner, prophet. I never knew her to lose her patience with six children (Sarah Smith had come along by then). I don't think she ever tackled our horse stables, but I do remember once when no one was around to milk the cow, she and I went to the barn to try our hand for the first time. Each time we would try to extract some milk, the old cow would give us a

vicious kick. After several attempts we gave up in disgust only to find out later that we were trying to milk on the wrong side of Old Bossy.

When the Armistice was signed November 11, 1918 (which I remember so well), Aunt Cornelia, Jimmy, Ballie and I were in the fields harvesting navy beans when we heard the news.[9] The rest of the family was scattered - Momma was in Charlottesville with Joe who had the flu, Sarah was staying with Mrs. Florence Roach[10] in Surry while Momma was away and Charlie Gray was in France.

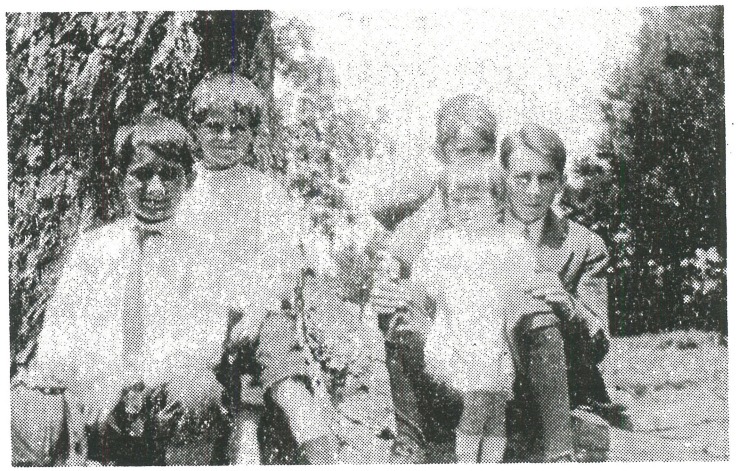
I don't know how much longer Aunt Cornelia stayed with us after that, but her love and devotion to us will never, never be forgotten. Thinking of the many times I watched her make biscuits in a style all her own,[11] waiting to grab the first one out of the oven, I just wonder how she could be so patient with "our chillen" as she used to call us. But after all, she was of another generation and they are no more.

I enjoy thinking back over the years I spent with the good Christian woman. I like to remember her as she sat by the cook stove nightly toasting plug tobacco and smoking it in her clay pipe - oh, how good it smelled. I like to remember how she called us "our chillen" and how she used to talk about her husband, Davie.

I hope in her later years that she enjoyed life a little more as I'm sure from the few things she told me that her early days were most trying. The experiences in Chesterfield and having her brother[12] taken away by the Yankees never to be seen again, certainly were enough to test anyone's faith.

When she became feeble from age, Aunt Cornelia went back to Chippokes to live with Pattie, and there on July 24, 1931 passed to her just reward. The burial was held on Sunday, July 26th.[13] All of us Rowells followed the procession to Mount Ray Cemetery,[14] and after the regular service, Charlie Gray and Sarah Smith sang the hymn "Shall We Gather at the River." Thus this good and godly woman was laid to rest among the pines and peanut fields - a life and era that has gone with the wind.

Charles E. and Lucy H. Rowell, Joseph Wheeler and Charles Gray Rowell



OUR CHILLEN

James, Richard Francis (Ballie), Tom, Sarah and Joe

Footnotes

1. Mantura was a southern plantation south of Bacon's Castle. The original tract is believed to have been around 1,000 acres, reaching from what is now Route 10 to Route 617, the old Hog Island Road.

   The main house was a spacious two story brick building, probably built in the early nineteenth century. There were high porch columns, large rooms (four to each floor) and a long wide hall. The house was landscaped with old English boxwood that were tremendous in size and quite numerous.

   I remember visiting Mantura when Uncle Jimmy Rowell (who died in 1914) was living there. Sometime after the Rowells moved, the Mantura house burned (in the 1920's) and no evidence remains today. It is believed the bricks from the house were either used by Mr. W. P. Wilson to build his home in Rushmere, or were sold to Colonial Williamsburg.

   The current tract for Mantura farm is 417.5 acres and belongs to Mary Pegram Worthington, granddaughter of William R. and Martha Pegram Wilson.

   I regret that I could not get a better picture of the Mantura dwelling, but it was the only one I could locate and that shows only a small part.

2. Willie Winfield told me he remembers Aunt Cornelia's husband, David Drew. The Drews lived in a house behind Rich Neck house. Willie believes David died around 1905. No doubt after David's death, Aunt Cornelia went to live with Pattie at Chippokes.

Willie Winfield who is 90 years old (born in 1892), worked from 1909 for us on the farm until he went into the Army (World War I). According to Daddy's farm account book, Willie earned $3.60 a week (plus dinner) while with us. Willie tells that he gave most of the money to his father, who used it to buy corn for his horse.

As a boy of twelve, Willie worked for Capt. George A. Savedge, a merchant and farmer at Alliance, for 50 cents a day. During the Jamestown Exposition in 1907, Capt. Savedge gave him a bonus of one dollar. He and his Daddy (Hardy Winfield) drove a horse and buggy to Smithfield, took the steamer to the exposition, spent his one dollar at the fair and returned that night.

When Willie returned from the war, he enrolled in St. Paul's Industrial and Agricultural School in Lawrenceville, Virginia, learning carpentry. The back wing of Momma's house is the result of Willie's labors. Three of Willie's children received degrees from the same school.

3. Aunt Lucy Gwaltney lived in the little house on the hill of Uncle John's farm. Auntie Gray was Daddy's sister.

4. Captain Gray (Uncle John) and Auntie owned a sailboat and used it to haul farm produce and merchandise to and from market.

   Some true tales about the boat:

   One the boat sank while carrying a load of peanuts. Uncle John and Auntie clung to bags of peanuts and reached shore safely.

Once the back of the boat caught fire and Uncle John tried to put out the fire with his bare feet. He had to be hospitalized for burns.

Momma told me that one winter when the river froze over, they walked out some distance from shore and among the things they retrieved from the boat was a lot of frozen apples.

Once Uncle John transported a load of watermelons to Roanoke Dock in Norfolk. A Jewish man came aboard and began to express his dislikes for that melon or another, and couldn't find one to suit him. Uncle John, patience exhausted, picked up a melon, crowned him over the head with it and told him to take that one free.

5. Uncle John had just bought a gasoline powered boat to help the sailboat when there was no wind. The gasoline boat was skippered by a good Negro, Elijah Jones. (Gas boats were something new.) Elijah would take us to the fair each day in the gas boat - that was quite a thrill. It was on these trips to the Exposition Grounds that I remember seeing Trixie, the Educated Horse; The Battle of the Merrimack and Monitor of Civil War fame; the original Buster Brown in person advertising Buster Brown shoes; The 101 Ranch from Texas, a wild west show with Indians and cowboys; and Captain John Smith trading beads for food with the Indians at Jamestown. The same Smith and Indians are at the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

6. The house the Drew's lived in at Rich Neck was only about a mile from where we lived (Barlow's) at the time of David's death. It could be that it was at this time (1905) that Aunt Cornelia started living with us. Charlie Gray remembers Aunt Cornelia walking from Rich Neck to our house (with her daughter, Pattie) to do our wash.

7. Aunt Cornelia slept on a pallet in the kitchen. Each morning, she would roll up the pallet and store it in the hall closet. During all the years that Aunt Cornelia lived with us, I never arose soon enough to find her pallet any place but the closet.

8. Clothes basket Aunt Cornelia used is at Cheriton Farms today.

9. During the war, everybody was asked to raise some navy beans.

10. Mrs. Roach (deceased) was mother of my sister-in-law, Mrs. Charles G. Rowell.

11. Aunt Cornelia's biscuits, which may have not been the best, were certainly made by a unique method. After the dough was kneaded, she would take a piece about the size of a small door knob, flatten it out, shape it round, pull the outside edges to the center and top, pinch off the dough pulled to the center, and finally hit the center of the remaining dough with the palm of her hand - the result was a round biscuit. The scrap of dough pinched off would be mixed with the remaining dough, and so on until all the batch was used.

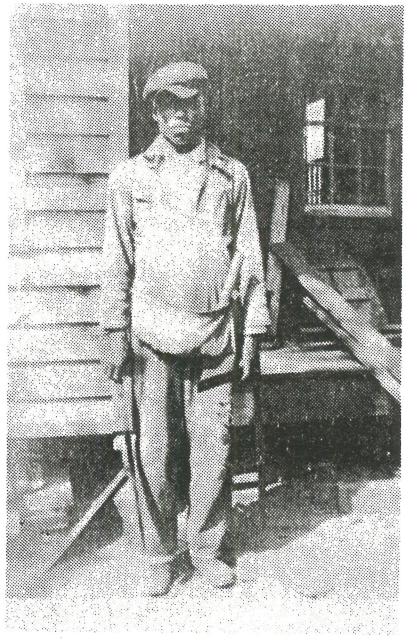
12. Aunt Cornelia gave me a desk that her brother had made. We still have the desk.
13. The burial was delayed somewhat as somebody paid the undertaker more money to add more fluid to the body.
14. Mount Ray Cemetery is across Route 10 from Mantura. We recently erected a tombstone for Aunt Cornelia.

Additional Notes

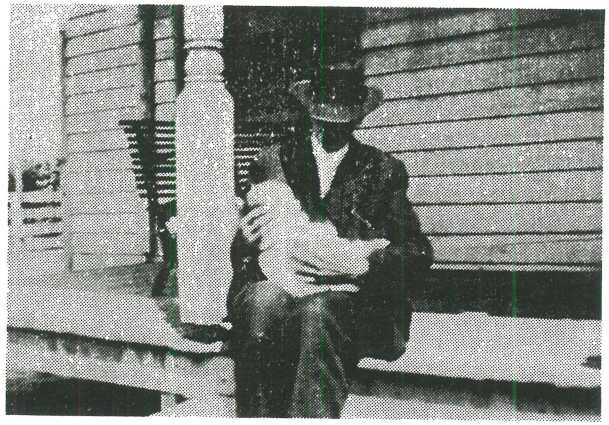
Major Blair Pegram served with distinction in the War Between the States. I remember him well and in my time he was a big Sunday School worker and teacher. Daddy and Momma lived at Walnut Valley when they were first married. Major Pegram (who owned Walnut Valley) lived in the big house (Raymond Mitchell lives there now) and the newlyweds lived in a smaller house (not standing now). Momma used to tell this story about Major Pegram's talking - He and Daddy met one morning as Major Pegram was returning from milking and they talked so long the milk soured.

Major Pegram's connection with the story is that he was brother to the Mantura bride, Martha Elizabeth Wilson, who took Aunt Cornelia home on her wedding day.

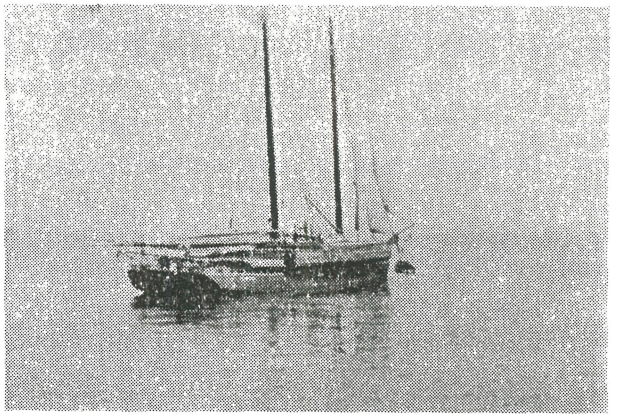
Major Pegram was also grandfather to Mr. Walker Pegram Warren and that is how Mr. Warren inherited Walnut Valley. Walnut Valley was sold after Mr. Warren's death in 1972.



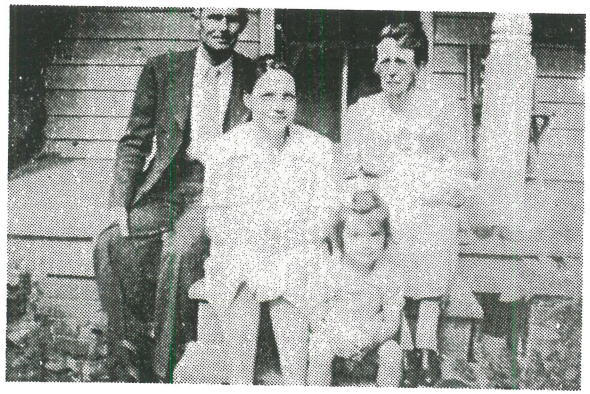
Willie Winfield, carpenter, at the Rowell homeplace



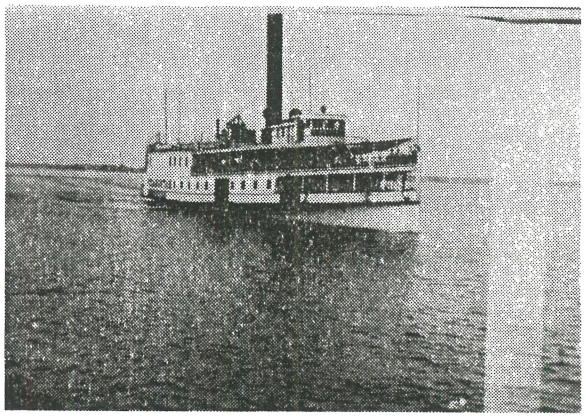
Captain John Gray



Uncle John's boat, Seth M. Tuttle



Tom, Kathryn, Auntie Gray holding
Mary Kathryn and Anne Taylor



Pocahontas

Sarah and "Anklenelia"

I must have been nearly a teenager before I knew her real name because all the family called her "Anklenelia", as if one word. But Aunt Cornelia was truly part of our family and we all loved her.

Two or three things stand out in my memory of this dear old lady but I was too young to grasp the historical facts of the times. I do remember her telling us about being a slave and having to work in the horse stables in Petersburg during the Civil War - that was indeed a sad and cruel story for her.

She always dressed neat and clean with apron and a white bandana scarf over her head. I don't remember ever seeing her bare head. She felt her place was in the kitchen and only ventured to the sitting room on special occasions. But the kitchen was always the busiest and happiest room in the house, anyway. It was in the kitchen that I begged for coffee like the rest of the family. She indulged me. I sat in her lap while she filled the cup - half coffee, half milk, sugar and crumbled cold biscuits. To me it was a wonderful concoction then; now I shudder to think of how it must have tasted.

But Christmas is always the best memory. We always had cedar trees with candles and the old shiny ornaments and tinsel garlands. After supper on Christmas Eve we would gather in the sitting room to enjoy the tree and Aunt Cornelia would sit in the corner and smoke her clay pipe, which she enjoyed so much. That pipe smoke was the best aroma in the world mixed with the scent of the cedar Christmas tree.

I don't remember when Tom stopped going to Chippokes to get Aunt Cornelia to stay with us. I was busy with school and growing up. Naturally, she was growing older and less strong and healthy. At that time I didn't realize how old she really was. When I was 6, she was 87!

I do remember going to see her when she was ill and bed-ridden. It was sad for all of us to see her lying helpless. But Momma was angry to find that her daughter wasn't looking after Aunt Cornelia like she thought was right. She gave her sharp lectures on cleanliness and keeping the flies away.

Charlie Gray and I sang hymns at her funeral. We were proud to do that for her but it was a sad occasion. She had been a treasured friend and family member to us all.

Sarah Smith Rowell Johnson
December, 1981

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